

Session Name and Time: Complaints Management -- Effective Telephone System

Featured Speaker:

Kerry Weiss, Office of Administration & Resources Management (OARM), introduced speaker talking about OARM/EPA study of complaint management systems in other government organizations. Task force learned world class leaders make complaints an opportunity to improve -- must be easy for customers to complain and agency must respond quickly and courteously. Kerry provided a handout on lessons learned on complaints management by the OARM task force.

Lessons Learned:

Communicate with staff often and early.

Design communication pieces to reach the intended audience.

Staff must understand vision and role of complaints.

Planning is never done--must design and refine continuously

Need to include "partnership agreements" between complaint center and organizations that must resolve problems

Provide staff FAQ lists and update

Dan Rumelt, Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSP), discussed dealing with complaints from consumers of products, which is a major responsibility for his agency. The agency provides a toll-free hotline for consumers to complain about products; however some of the complaints are about how the Commission provided service. Ten contract personnel staff this hotline.

Presentation Summary:

Hotline staff must capture a story on complaints about products. Many callers call back to find out what action was taken on their complaints. Some complaints will receive closure and action and some won't. The agency can negotiate recalls with companies, but consumers may see the negotiated recall as not favorable to consumers. CPSC will receive complaints

expected notification from agency on what was done with their complaint. CSPC frequently receives erroneous complaints -- either to wrong agency or for wrong action/information.

CPSC put together a web site for consumers to go through a checklist which helps people find out exactly where to go to get their specific problem resolved. The site at www.consumer.gov has a checklist for identifying where to go for specific problems.

CPSC does sampling to determine call hold time and it is almost zero during busy and slower times. They have a standard of 95% of people will be transferred to a representative within 30 seconds. Their service representatives spend more time with calls -- maybe 20 minutes. Their staff uses the Consumer Resource Handbook as a major referral tool.

Important Ideas from the Discussion:

Obstacles to better complaint resolution:

1. Statutory -- most resolutions are negotiated and may take a long time to resolve.
2. Political Concerns
3. No agency designated to handle a specific issue
4. Money and Resources
5. Increase in e-mail and how to respond and get that information into database
6. Capturing all information that comes into the agency in different ways.

Improvements:

1. Officer of the day who takes responsibility for difficult problems -- carry it through to resolution.
2. Web Site to direct consumers to the right place. Refer people who have Internet access to web site to get information on exactly where to take their issues.

Key Questions of the Speaker:

1. Q: Do you keep records on hold times?
A: Yes, do random sampling and standard of 95% of people referred within 30 seconds.

How can EPA use this information?

EPA can use the way this system is managed and the databases as low-cost models that are effective in addressing large numbers of complaints that take significant time to resolve.

The issue of referring our callers/complaints to the right place for resolution is also applicable to EPA. We need better follow through to be sure callers get the right agency and person when we are not the right agency.

Where in EPA can this information be used?

Superfund, RCRA, Air Compliance, Drinking Water -- other areas that receive many complaints on specific environmental problems in specific locations. Most offices and regions do not have an organized way to address these complaints.

Any commitments to follow-up action at EPA:

List of participants: No list retrieved -- about 28 participants.

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